

**STAFFORDSHIRE AND STOKE ON TRENT**  
**ARCHIVE SERVICE**

**FORWARD PLAN**

**2009-2012**

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## **FORWARD PLAN, 2009-2012**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The role of the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service is to safeguard the future of the rich and irreplaceable archival heritage of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent and to provide an excellent, innovative and responsive archive service of the highest quality. We carry out this role in three ways: firstly by locating, collecting and preserving archive collections relating to past and present life in Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent; secondly by encouraging positively the use of archives through the public services, which we provide, and by making quality information about our collections widely accessible; and thirdly by fostering appreciation and enjoyment of the archival heritage through learning, interpretation and promotional activities which form an integral part of our work.
- 1.2 The Joint Archive Service works to a three year Forward Plan which sets the direction of travel for the Service's continuing development. The Forward Plan is supported by annual service and implementation plans, against which performance is regularly monitored, and it is underpinned by a range of service policies.
- 1.3 The period, 2006 – 2009, saw the delivery of the fourth three-year Forward Plan for the Joint Archive Service. During this three years, the County Archive Service celebrated its 60th anniversary and the Joint Archive Service its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Joint Service emerged under the National Archives new self - assessment process as one of the leading local authority archive services in England and Wales, an achievement which was all the more significant because of the multi-repository nature of the Service. Our most outwardly - visible success was the delivery of the major, externally- funded Sutherland Papers Project, which followed on the acquisition of this collection in 2006. We also continued to demonstrate continuous improvement in customer service by achieving full compliance against the Charter Mark Standard following a full assessment in 2007 and a mandatory review in 2008 .
- 1.4. It was therefore a satisfying three years in terms of performance, a performance which we aim to maintain and exceed in the next three years. However, the Service must strive to move forward in other ways. Notably we need to recognise that the Archive Service cannot simply continue to deliver more of the same. We need to develop new models of engagement, to diversify our acquisition and outreach work and to market our public profile far better than we have done so far. In the light of falling personal visits, we need to appreciate that the next three years may have to see some service transformation. In the next two years, the Service will also make the transition to the Government's new and demanding Customer Service Excellence Standard.
- 1.5. The Service will therefore be challenged, especially within a climate of continuing financial stringency. In this context it is crucial that we continue to demonstrate the contribution which the Archive Service makes to the corporate aims and priorities of both the County Council and the City Council. Nationally we await the

publication of the new, long-awaited government policy for archives. Underpinning our work at all times is the need to continue to listen to our users, to strengthen our existing and productive partnerships and to seek new ones where it is appropriate to do so and to improve our care of collections.

1.5 Our vision for the next three years is:

***To make the Archive Service the place to discover Staffordshire's history.***

1.6 The word 'discover' has been chosen advisedly. It encapsulates the experience of using archives for whatever purpose. As well as the challenges identified above, the forthcoming three years offer exciting opportunities. The Service has been awarded a significant cataloguing grant in a very competitive climate to open up a major core collection, the papers of the Court of Quarter Sessions, and this will be supported by a wider and longer access project, based on Quarter Sessions. This project will provide new work for our volunteers as well as deliver a range of other related activities.

1.7 The New Forward Plan also runs concurrently with the Cultural Olympiad and we will be seeking to make the most of the opportunities which this provides to raise the profile of archives. We will also be looking to maximise the opportunities to acquire further external funding, singly or in partnership, which will help to diversify collecting activities and audiences for archives as well as improving access. The outcomes and benefits of the Sutherland Papers Project will also see further promotion and we will be developing further our online presence to bring the enjoyment and interest engendered by Staffordshire's archives closer to home.

## **2. SERVICE PROFILE**

2.1 The Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service is jointly funded and administered by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council.

### **2.2 Service Aims**

- To ensure that the archives of our parent authorities are preserved for present and future use by their administrations and by the public
- To locate, collect and preserve irreplaceable archive collections relating to the past and present life and work of people of the County of Staffordshire and the City of Stoke on Trent and to preserve the archives of the Diocese of Lichfield, thereby contributing to the national network of archive care
- To provide and promote public services and activities which enable and encourage the use of archive collections held by the Joint Archive Service
- To build partnerships which promote the information, practical and heritage value of archives and which extend their use
- To provide a high quality and responsive archive service by effective and efficient management within available resources and in accordance with current best archive practice.

### 2.3 **Service Delivery**

The Service is operated through three record offices: the Staffordshire County Record Office in Stafford; the Lichfield Record Office ( the record office for the Diocese and City of Lichfield); and Stoke on Trent City Archives in Hanley. We also contribute to the provision of the Family and Local History Centre at Burton Library. In addition the Service manages the William Salt Library in Stafford on behalf of the William Salt Library Trust and is responsible for the delivery of the Library's public services.

2.4 Within Staffordshire County Council, the Service is part of the Culture and Libraries Division of the Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate. Within Stoke on Trent City Council the Service is part of the Community Services Division in the Directorate of Adult Social Care, Health and Communities.

### 2.5 **Key Services Delivered**

- Locating, collecting and acquiring original and unique archive collections relating to Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent, subject to archival legislation and the approved Collecting Policy of the Joint Archive Service
- The provision and management of archival quality storage and environmental conditions to meet national standards of care and in accordance with best archival practice, so ensuring the long-term preservation of unique collections
- The cataloguing of collections to international cataloguing standards to enable access to their contents
- The conservation of archival documents to ensure their long term preservation
- The provision of public services to enable the consultation of original and microform archive collections and online access to family and local history resources
- The provision of expert advice and guidance to the public arising from personal, written and telephone enquiries about the use and content of archive collections
- The provision of a wide range of reprographics services and the provision of research services
- The provision of a range of innovative learning opportunities for school pupils, higher education students and lifelong learners
- The provision of opportunities for volunteer working to enhance public access to archives
- An annual programme to create surrogates of archives to further preservation and access
- The delivery of an annual programme of events to promote the use and enjoyment of archives
- The ongoing development and publication of information about archive collections by means of an online catalogue database, online resource sites and a range of hard copy resources
- A venue based and online exhibition programme
- The provision of advice and support for Staffordshire's communities in the care of community archives
- Advice to owners of collections to ensure the long term care of collections and liaison with other archive holding organisations in the County

- The management of the William Salt Library and its collections and the delivery of its public services

## 2.6 Key partnerships

The Joint Archive Service itself represents a key partnership between Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council.

Our other key partners for service provision and delivery are: The William Salt Library Trust; The Diocese of Lichfield; the Victoria County History of Staffordshire; The Friends of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archives Service (FoSSA); Staffordshire County Council's Historic Environment Record; the Staffordshire Arts and Museum Service; Staffordshire Library and Information Service and the Schools Improvement Division.

## 3 KEY SERVICE STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES, 2009-2012

### 3.1 To put the customer at the heart of service delivery

#### Underpinning themes

- Working to meet the national standards for customer service and archive access
- Maintaining very high levels of customer satisfaction
- Developing improved user consultation mechanisms
- Enhancing the personal experience of using archives
- Investing in frontline staff

#### Projected Outcomes

- Achieving the Customer Excellence Standard and Standard for Access
- A quality experience for onsite visitors to the Archive Service, leading to return visits
- A clearer understanding by the Service of customer needs and expectations

### 3.2 To build on our innovative online presence

#### Underpinning themes

- Introducing new features and developing existing online resources
- Producing and publishing new online indexes to archives for family and local historians
- Developing new interpretation of collections through exhibitions, featured collections and learning packages
- Investigating new partnerships to promote online activity

#### Projected Outcomes

- Improved online interpretation of Staffordshire's archives
- More publicity for Staffordshire's archives
- Improved access into collections for family historians
- Increased online audiences for Staffordshire's archives

### 3.3 To engage with Staffordshire's communities to strengthen their sense of identity and place

#### **Underpinning Themes**

- Extending and developing programmes of community-based activities
- Ensuring that our collecting activity aims to reflect the diversity of Staffordshire's communities
- Providing advice and support for creators of community archives
- Strengthening our links with local organisations throughout the County and the City
- Focusing on economically deprived communities

#### **Projected Outcomes**

- Modernisation in collecting activity
- Closing the gap between Staffordshire's communities and a centrally based archive service
- Wider interpretation of the history of Staffordshire's communities

### **3.4 To engage people of all ages in activities which celebrate and discover Staffordshire's history**

#### **Underpinning Themes**

- Offering further learning opportunities for young people to enjoy and achieve
- Offering further formal and informal learning opportunities for adults
- Enabling people to explore and enjoy the richness of archives through a range of events
- Delivering the Quarter Sessions Access Project
- Ensuring the continuity and expansion of volunteer activities
- Supporting Staffordshire's commitment to the Cultural Olympiad through the delivery of the "Olympic Archives" programme

#### **Projected Outcomes**

- Continuation, refresh and expansion of quality learning opportunities and experiences
- Raised awareness of the relevance of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent's archival heritage for learning
- New strategies to maintain audiences for archives
- New public access to archives through the work of volunteers
- An archival legacy for Staffordshire from the 2012 Olympics

### **3.5 To continue to build and deliver an excellent and high performing service**

#### **Underpinning Themes**

- Maintaining the position of the Archive Service as a TNA 4\* service and improving its overall score
- Developing and delivering a service-wide marketing plan
- Continuing to invest in staff to ensure seamless and excellent service provision
- Regular inward investment in the quality of our buildings

### **Projected outcomes**

- Providing one of the best local authority archive services in the country
- Raised awareness of the Archive Service and its range of services
- Strategies for public service transformation in 2012-2015
- Supporting the climate change agenda
- Maintaining the TNA 3\* rating in buildings and environment

## **3.6 To improve and promote user access to collections**

### **Underpinning Themes**

- Providing 96% online access to useable collection catalogues
- Improving information and publicity about Staffordshire's collections
- Continuing to make more collections accessible through cataloguing
- Extending further the online catalogue to include other cultural collections

### **Projected Outcomes**

- More information about Staffordshire's archives at the press of a button
- Further measurable reductions in cataloguing backlogs
- Compliance with archival legislation in respect of collections

## **3.7 To deliver high quality care and management of collections**

### **Underpinning Themes**

- Maintaining excellence in the conservation of collections
- Improving our environmental care for collections
- Delivering Phases 4-6 of the Sutherland Collection Conservation Plan
- Ensuring that the Archive Service can meet the challenge of digital preservation
- Reviewing and extending our surrogacy programme
- Ensuring continuing liaison with libraries and museums to support collections care

### **Projected Outcomes**

- Tangible improvements in the care of collections
- A digital archive repository in place
- Maintaining The National Archives 4\* rating in preservation and conservation

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The Forward Plan for 2009-2012 provides an ambitious direction of travel for the Joint Archive Service while maintaining its commitment to excellence and a solid underpinning foundation of achievement and consistency of performance. It is anticipated that by the end of the next three years, strategies for service transformation will be in place to address some of the ongoing trends and challenges which are facing the Archive Service at this point in its development.